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Door open for talks on arms, Reagan says

By Storer Rowley
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BOWLING GREEN, Ohio—Two days before his meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, President Reagan declared here Wednesday, "We are prepared to negotiate on nuclear arms reductions tomorrow if the Soviets so choose."

Meanwhile, Vice President George Bush said Wednesday in Springfield, Ill., that he has asked his attorney to confer with the Government Ethics Office to determine if he can release his income tax returns without breaking the legal trust in which he placed his financial holdings in 1980.

In a campaign appeal to youthful voters at Bowling Green State University, the 73-year-old President tried to deflect criticism from Democratic challenger Walter Mondale that his defense build-up and hard line with the Soviets have made the world more dangerous.

"We in the United States passionately desire peace with our neighbors, our allies and our adversaries," the President told several thousand cheering and screaming students and faculty members packed into a gymnasium.

HOWEVER, Reagan also called for "firmness and steadiness" in foreign policy and quoted George Washington and John Kennedy to back up his advocacy of peace through strength. "Historically, unilateral disarmament has never worked," he said. "It has only encouraged aggressors."

Inside, Reagan was wildly applauded and welcomed with chants of "four more years" and "USA, USA, USA." Outside, several thousand enthusiastic students heard his remarks over loudspeakers.

When Reagan's helicopter landed in a field beside the gym, a large red tomato was hurled out from the waving crowd. It landed about 30 feet from the unperturbed President. A few dozen protesters with Mondale-Ferraro placards demonstrated near the building chanting "Go home, Ron."

In a question-and-answer session after his speech, Reagan said he hoped his White House meeting with Gromyko on Friday would help "open up a dialogue about the suspicions" in both countries that the other side wants war.

Reagan also offered a new wrinkle in the controversy over last week's suicide bombing of the U.S. embassy annex in East Beirut, blaming it in part on the dismantling of some of the nation's intelligence operations under former President Jimmy Carter.

Asked by a student if he would beef up security at American embassies around the world, Reagan said, "Yes, we're going to do everything we can."

But, he added, "the real protection—and where we're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years"—will be in rebuilding and beefing up the nation's intelligence network.

"Your biggest protection is to, and we're trying to, rebuild our intelligence to where you'll find out and know in advance what the target might be and be prepared for it," he said.

He was referring to former CIA Director Stansfield Turner's cutbacks in the ranks of senior intelligence officers and covert operations during the Carter years. Reagan described it as "the effort... somehow to say, well, spying is somehow dishonest and let's get rid

of our intelligence agents, and we did that to a large extent."

BUSH, AMID renewed questions about his private finances, said he has asked his attorney, Dean Burch, "to go down and talk today to the ethics office and we'll see what can be worked out."

The request for Burch to find out about release of the returns marks

a shift in Bush's position on the issue, which first came up when Democratic vice presidential nominee Geraldine Ferraro was under pressure to make a full financial disclosure, including income tax returns filed by her and her husband.

Tribune correspondent Dorothy Collin contributed to this story.